

*Governor's Layoff Plan Unfairly Slashes 45 Regional Positions with
No Similar Cuts at Comparable New York Facilities*

Washington, D.C. -- Congressman Maurice Hinchey (D-NY) today called on Governor David Paterson, asking him to take steps to ensure that a new round of planned staffing cuts at New York State's Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) are reevaluated to prevent a disproportionate impact at the Belleayre Mountain Ski Center. The Highmount, NY facility owned and operated by the DEC is slated to absorb nearly one-third of the 140 proposed statewide cuts to the DEC. If nothing is changed, 45 of 58 full time positions at Belleayre will be eliminated in the newly announced round of layoffs.

"I am hopeful that Governor Paterson will take a closer look at how these planned layoffs would unfairly affect workers at the Belleayre Mountain Ski Center," said Hinchey. "Similar facilities across the state have not been asked to consider similar cuts in staffing. If things don't change, these cuts will hamstring the continued successful operation of this facility, hurting families who use the resort as a source of low cost recreation and shortchanging the area's small businesses that benefit from the expanded customer base."

Belleayre has emerged as a center for winter sports in the Catskill region and an economic catalyst for surrounding communities. Local businesses, including restaurants, lodges and shops continue to benefit each year as thousands flock to this state of the art ski facility. The full text of Hinchey's letter to Paterson follows, indicating his concern for the negative economic consequences that will occur if planned job cuts move forward.

December 1, 2010
The Honorable David Paterson
New York State Governor
Executive Chamber, State Capitol
Albany, New York 12224

Re: Belleayre Mountain Ski Center

Dear Governor Paterson:

I am writing to express my serious concerns about the scheduled major reduction in state employees at the Belleayre Mountain Ski Center. I am genuinely troubled by the negative consequences that an 80 percent reduction in the permanent workforce of Department of Environmental Conservation employees might have on the facility. The cuts will not only leave more than three dozen people without full time employment but, moving forward, will have a serious impact on the economic stability of the surrounding communities that have built themselves around tourism and the ski industry.

Over the last 25 years, Belleayre Mountain Ski Center has become known as one of the best family ski facilities in the northeast. Investments by the state into high speed chair lifts, expanded trails and terrain parks, as well as affordable pricing have resulted in an upward trend in attendance. This trend has become even more evident as families look for recreational opportunities that are closer to home during these challenging economic times. Belleayre has clearly emerged as a vital state resource and a strong, regional economic engine. As such, I am concerned that these important factors were not adequately evaluated before the reduction in staffing was ordered.

As I understand it, 16 percent of all state employee cuts during this round are coming from the DEC roster, the largest percentage among all state agencies. Earlier this year, almost 260 positions from the DEC were lost through either direct elimination or early retirement. In this most recent round of staff reductions, the DEC was directed to eliminate an additional 140 full time positions across the state with 32 percent of those positions, a total of 45 out of 58 full time positions, being cut from the Belleayre site. In total, Belleayre is being asked to absorb 32% of the current staffing cuts ordered for the DEC or a total of 11% of all state employee reductions this year.

Please be assured that I understand the grave economic situation that the State of New York is facing and your need, as the Chief Executive, to make difficult choices to bring balance back to our states finances. However, I am troubled by the fact that the DEC and Belleayre Ski Center in particular, have been disproportionately impacted by these cuts. What makes the cuts at Belleayre even more disconcerting is the fact that other DEC managed ski facilities such as Gore Mountain, White Face and the Olympic Regional Development Authority (ORDA) have not been required or even considered for similar reductions in staffing.

I do not think that it is unreasonable to expect that there will be some consolidations and reductions in services and staffing in the current economic climate. However, I feel strongly that there should be equity in how those consolidations and reductions are distributed among and within each agency. I strongly encourage you to reevaluate the proposed cuts to the Belleayre Ski Center, taking into consideration how it will impact the local and regional economy and the long term prospects for the center. I would also ask that you do the same evaluations at the other DEC managed ski centers to determine how the burden created by these staffing cuts might be more equitably dispersed throughout the state.

I believe that given the right level of support, Belleayre can continue to be an asset for New York State, provide meaningful employment opportunities for area residents and high quality recreational opportunities for the entire region. I am confident that you will take steps to examine this situation in greater detail and seek a meaningful way in which to improve the current situation.

Thank you for your thoughtful attention to this vitally important issue.

Best regards.

Sincerely,

Maurice D. Hinchey